

Magnolia Officinalis Rehder & Wilson

This fine Magnolia is closely related to, and has been confused with, the Japanese *M. obvata*, better known in gardens as *M. hypoleuca* and naturally enough since the foliage of the two species is identical. There are, however, in bark and fruit many noticeable differences. The Japanese species has a purplish bark on shoots one year old, the staminal and carpellary column is about two inches long, acutish at the summit, and the filaments are more than two thirds as long as the anthers. The fruit is cylindrical, six to eight inches long, about two inches wide, somewhat pointed at the apex and attenuate at the base. The ripe carpels have long, usually slightly recurved beaks, and rather thin walls. Doubtless

when it is possible to compare living flowers, one with another, other differences will be noted. The different color of the branches is an infallible character by which to distinguish the two species at any season of the year.

On the mountains of western Hupeh and Szechuan up to elevations of 6000 feet above sea level *M. officinalis* is commonly cultivated, but I never met with a spontaneous tree in the forests. This remark would apply to many other Chinese trees of economic value (*Gleditsia officinalis* and *Eucommia ulmoides*, for example) but there is no reason to doubt that all of them are truly natives of the region where they are also found cultivated. Trees valued for the medicinal value of their bark



Flowers of *M. officinalis* (left) and *M. fraseri* (right) opened simultaneously on adjacent trees in Phil Seitner's garden.

have little hope of surviving the depredations of countless generations of Chinese. It is only as cultivated plants that they have a chance to survive, although probably in some remote district there yet remain genuinely wild specimens. At Kuling, and in other places as far east as the coastal province of Chekiang, a variety (*biloba*) is frequently seen about houses.⁶ The type itself has also been gathered in Chekiang province. It would appear, then, that *M. officinalis* is spread from the coast westward to the confines of the Chino-Thibetan borderland.

This new *Magnolia* does not grow to so large a size as its Japanese relative, through the flowers and foliage are equally handsome. The Chinese designate this species the "Hou-p'o" tree, and its bark and flower-buds constitute a valued drug which is exported in quantity from central and western China to all parts of the Empire. It is for its bark and flower-buds that the tree is cultivated. The removal of the bark causes the death of the tree and this would account for its disappearance from the forests. The bark when boiled yields an extract which is taken internally as a cure for coughs, colds and as a tonic and stimulant during the convalescence. A similar extract obtained from the flower-buds, which are called "Yu-p'o" is esteemed as a medicine for women.

L'Abbe David would appear to have been the discoverer of this new *Magnolia*, since his fragmentary specimen collected in Mupin in 1869 and doubtfully named *Talauma* by Franchet apparently is this plant. It was collected in Hupeh first by A. Henry about 1888. I met with it in flower in Changyang district in May 1900, and in the autumn collected seeds (#877) which I forwarded, packed in earth, to Messrs. Veitch. They vegetated freely but, unfortunately,

under the mistaken idea that this species was the same as that of Japan, only a dozen plants were saved. At my instigation so that the Chinese form could be preserved in cultivation, Kew obtained one or two of these plants. Later Mr. J.C. Williams and a few other enthusiasts purchased the remainder.

It was fortunate that these precautions were taken since, although in 1908 I sent seeds (#652 A)⁷ to the Arnold Arboretum, no other plants were raised. At Caerhays Castle this plant flowered for the first time in cultivation and is now a handsome tree some feet high.⁴ In another place I have pointed out that the floras of China and Japan, though closely related, are specifically distinct, yet the old belief of their identity still persists. In my early collecting days I suffered from this bogey, but less perhaps than others due largely to my contumacious attitude. Looking back I only wish I had been even more rebellious towards accepted botanical authority.

6. Spongberg offers further discussion of the variety *biloba*. Newsletter Amer. Mag. Soc. 14 (1): 3-7. 1978.

7. Spongberg indicates that Wilson 652 is the type collection; however, no lectotype has been chosen from flowering and fruiting collections.

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